

REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

by the working group delegated with the responsibility for the

ASSEMBLY ROOMS PUBLIC CONSULTATION

SEPTEMBER 10TH – OCTOBER 11TH 2010

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Cllr Keith Humphries, Cllr Sue Fraser, Cllr Tony Nicklin (chairman), Cllr Veronica Burden

Preamble

The Consultation Working Group would like to thank the hundreds of residents who took part in this consultation. It was evident, from the pattern of individual responses, that the great majority had taken the time and trouble to consider the questions and to give their opinion. It was also clear that many people held passionate views one way or the other about the development of a civic centre although generally it was those who felt that the refurbishment would not be worth the money who made written comment.

A local newspaper published critical letters from readers during the period of the consultation. It is not known whether these had any effect on those residents still to return their consultations. There were no blank returns amongst those received in the first few days although there was a discernable increase in negative comments and blank forms returned as time went on. One blank form was returned with a photocopy of a critical newspaper letter attached.

It is important to note that this was a **consultation** and the results will be added to the portfolio of documents which need to be considered by full Council before coming to any decisions. It was an information gathering exercise and not a vote, poll or ballot nor did it confer any mandate.

A number of complaints were made that the consultation was a “sham” designed to get the result the council wanted. These kind of comments are a feature of most public consultations – indeed the Town Council made the same kind of observations concerning the Wiltshire Council car parking consultation. The working group organised a consultation to fill gaps in knowledge and to ask questions that would assist in gathering relevant views to inform the Council's decision making. These may not be the same questions that residents who are critical might wish to ask. Indeed they may not know what it is the organisers don't know. To try and instil a sense of confidence the working group tried hard to ensure that the questions were not leading or biased towards pre-determined results including taking independent advice. The fact that a big majority of those responding did not articulate the view that the consultation was a “done deal” indicates some success.

Introduction

Warminster Town Council has been investigating the development of a Community Hub / Civic Centre and the possibility of refurbishing the Assembly Rooms building to house the facilities. A great deal of evidence has been accumulated over many months. The Council stated from the start of the process that it would engage in a public consultation the results of which would be taken into account before any final decisions were made. This paper gives the results of that consultation.

In addition the Government's White Paper “Duty to Involve” lays a duty on public bodies to consult with the public before making decisions involving spending large sums of public money. As a matter of good governance Warminster Town Council subscribes to these principles and it is a matter of record that the Council, from the start of the process, has repeatedly stated that it would arrange a public consultation to help inform its final decision.

It is important that the Council has accurate information about the opinions of residents and that members of the public can have confidence in the results of this exercise.

Accordingly the consultation has been carried out in accordance with recognised procedures. These are used many hundreds of times a day throughout the world in professional market surveys and opinion polls. Accurate predictions are possible using standard statistical processes and formulae based on a normal curve of distribution, probability and a randomly selected sample of the population. Further details can be found at:

<http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html>

Methodology

- The responsibility for the consultation was delegated to a working group by decision of full Council.
- The working group met twice to decide on the information the Council would require to assist in its deliberations and to frame the necessary questions. Follow up meetings were held to finalise this document.
- Independent advice was taken to try to make sure that questions were not biased or leading.
- In view of the local interest in the Council's proposals and to eliminate any likely self-selection bias⁽¹⁾ occurring as a result of those holding strong views either for or against the proposals, a random sample of the population was posted a questionnaire with a covering letter, a facts sheet and a post paid return envelope.
- Every 5th address on the electoral roll (up to 2000 addresses) was selected to receive a questionnaire. The intention was that as individual responses were required only one person from the household would complete the survey although joint responses were acceptable and if this occurred added to the randomness of the sample.
- This was basically but not exclusively intended to be a survey of residents not households. It would be impossible for the Council to know the number of people that constituted a household when sending out forms.
- Questionnaires were stamped with a serial number before posting but these were **not** recorded against individual addresses.

The purpose was to give the public confidence in the results by ensuring that the sample remained random and that pressure groups either for or against the Council's proposals could not influence the consultation by submitting multiple duplicate copies. A second reason was to enable a random sample audit to take place to check for accuracy in entering the returned information into the computer program used for analysis.

Using serial numbers is standard practice in consultations such as market surveys and ballot papers for parliamentary elections.

¹⁾ In statistical terms self selection bias is a distortion which occurs when a sample chooses itself. It happens when highly motivated people with a strong opinions respond to a poll when those who accept the status quo or are apathetic do not. The result is a polarisation of results with extreme perspectives given a disproportionate weight. The last page of this report gives a clear example of self-selection bias using the results from the requested consultation forms.

- An initial sample of 1500 copies was posted with another 500 addresses held in reserve in case the return sample was less than the minimum 20% the working group deemed necessary.⁽²⁾ This was done to reduce postage costs yet maintain statistical validity.
- The number of returns received in the first two weeks (22.6%) was over the required minimum of 20% making the extra sample unnecessary – thus saving on costs.
- The cost of the survey is estimated at £1200.
- A number of residents did request to be included in the survey. To ensure that there would be no polarisation of results due to self-selection bias, consultation forms issued in response to requests were printed on a different colour paper which enabled them to be identified as a requested form and for them to be considered but collated and analysed separately from those of the random sample – see appendix 4. It was also necessary to ensure that if residents received a postal survey and subsequently requested and returned another form it could be kept separate from the random consultation.
- The consultation document included a section for comments which were **relevant** to the questions. Most of the respondents who gave a negative answer to question 15 (value for money?) took the opportunity to add their views sometimes at great length.
- Many points raised were not relevant to this consultation – (pedestrian crossings, policing, NHS, shops, parking, road works etc) so are not included below. There were also comments about the role of the Unitary Authority and the Big Society which were more suited to being raised at the Area Board.
- Due to the importance of question 15 (value for money?) the total number of responses and answers were independently verified.

Statistics

Total number of questionnaires posted	1500
Number of returned questionnaires	581
Number of blank questionnaires returned	21
Number of spoilt questionnaires returned	7
Number of questionnaires for analysis	553
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Percentage return (excluding blank and spoilt forms)	36.8%
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²⁾ The accuracy of a given sample size in reflecting the characteristics of a population usually is not greatly affected by the size of the population. If the sample comprises less than about a fifth of the population, then the size of the population is not important in determining how accurate a given sample size will be.

Residents asking to take part in the consultation

Number of requested questionnaires	45
Total number of returned questionnaires	26
Number of blank questionnaires returned	6
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Number of questionnaires for analysis	20
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Results

The response from the postal survey of almost 37% was good for a consultation of this type. It was clear from the random pattern of answers given on the majority of returns that residents had given a great deal of careful thought to their responses.

The questions were set out in a number of blocks.

Block One – This section was included to establish a base line and to gain information around the type of functions residents from Warminster had attended in the past.

Block Two – These were included to discover if there was public support for the provision of a community hall for hire and the appropriate size for meetings.

Block Three – This section was included in response to numerous complaints and confusion about previous charging policies of the council. The questions were generic and the results applicable to any facility the council might own and not just the Assembly Rooms.

Block Four – There is an increasing trend throughout the country to develop council chambers which are more inviting as part of an effort to increase community involvement in council matters. These were generic questions which apply to any building in which a council chamber might be established and could equally apply, if it becomes necessary, to revamped operations in Dewey House.

Block Five – This section dealt with the kind of facilities offered in other areas and whether residents thought they might be beneficial if offered in Warminster. The lists were not proposals but were intended to gain residents' views. The provision of such facilities is in line with the Wiltshire Community Plan (People, Places and Promises) 2011 – 2106 which is predicting a 60% increase in the 85+ age of residents in the next 15 years.

The survey then went on to ask if the location or site of the Assembly Rooms would make them suitable for developing a community hub.

Block Six – This section asked for the age range of respondents to allow for secondary analysis if required and also whether the proposal to develop a community hub was value for the proposed sum of money.

Block One

1) Have you attended a function in the Assembly Rooms in the last three years?

Yes	64%
No	35%
Did not answer	1%

2) If you answered YES to question 1 what type of function(s) did you attend?

Sale or bazaar	(223)	Dinner dance	(58)
Public meeting	(91)	Variety show	(36)
Business function	(14)	Blood donors	(70)
Exhibition	(100)	Wedding reception	(29)
Church / religious function	(23)		

Functions not in the list included, U3A (15), Presentations (15) and Fitness (7) amongst others.

Block Two

3) Do you think the town Council should provide a hall for residents or community and voluntary organisations to hire?

Yes	87%
No	11%
Did not answer	2%

4) The Assembly Rooms is licensed for a total of 750 people standing, 330 seated for meetings do you think the number that can be seated for a meeting is:

Of those who answered yes to question 1	About right	81%
	Too high	10%
	Too low	7%
	Did not answer	2%

Comment

This is a significant result. The nearest public hall for hire which could seat this number for a meeting is at Melksham. Trowbridge Civic Hall is currently closed and unavailable as it is undergoing a multi-million pound refurbishment scheme and will re-open in 2011.

Block Three

In the past there have been many complaints about extra charges for kitchen facilities from hirers. This was an attempt to find what residents, as well as hirers, generally think.

5) Should licensed bar facilities be provided as part of hall hire?

Yes	79%
No	18%
Did not answer	3%

6) Should kitchen facilities be provided as part of hall hire?

As part of costs	52%
At extra cost	46%
No	1%
Did not answer	1%

7) Should crockery and place settings be provided as part of hall hire?

As part of costs	45%
At extra cost	52%
No	2%
Did not answer	1%

Block four

8) Do you think that a dedicated room should be set aside to be used as a Council Chamber (the room where Council and committee meetings are usually held) or do you think that this is not necessary and that meetings could be held in any public room of suitable size?

Yes	79%
No	18%
Did not answer	3%

9) If a room is set aside as a Council chamber do you think it should be available for use for other purposes at times when it is not used for Council meetings?

Of those answering no to question 8	Yes	81%
	No	10%
	Did not answer	9%

10) The present Council chamber has 13 chairs for members of the public to attend meetings and to engage with the Council. Do you think that this number of chairs is.....

Too low	63%
About right	34%
Did not answer	3%

11) This question asked if the Assembly Rooms are **located** in a suitable place for development as a civic centre / community hub?

Yes	81%
No	15%
Did not answer	4.0%

Block Five

12) Wiltshire Council is planning to devolve certain services to town Councils and local community groups who wish to take them on. Respondents were asked to rate these on a scale from 1 to 5 where 5 represented the most useful.

	No answer	1	2	3	4	5
Grass cutting and landscaping	7	10	6	25	21	31
Grounds maintenance (e.g. parks and playing fields)	6	8	3	17	26	40
Enforcement (e.g. dog fouling, litter, graffiti)	6	9	4	14	19	48
Control and enforcement of car parks	7	18	11	22	15	27
Public toilets	6	8	4	19	19	44
Markets and street trading	7	12	9	20	19	33
Street cleaning	6	8	4	19	19	44

Comment

A number of Town and Parish Councils in Wiltshire have expressed a desire to take on services provided by Wiltshire Council as they feel that local control would provide better and cheaper results.

The process of devolution to those councils that have expressed an interest is in the pilot scheme stage and further details are due before Cabinet later this year.

Should a local council think it beneficial to deliver such service locally it will mean the allocation of funding and could involve accommodation for extra staff. It is part of the "Big Society" agenda to deliver services at the lowest tier of government or in the community.

- 13) This is a list of facilities and services provided by Councils in Community Hubs / Civic Centres in other parts of the country. Again respondents were asked for their opinion. The question did **not** mention the Assembly Rooms but asked if the facilities would be of benefit if they were to be provided in the community.

Percentages

	No answer	1	2	3	4	5
Meeting places for community organisations	8	9	6	17	18	39
Rooms for voluntary sector to deliver services	9	11	6	20	20	34
Health and wellbeing activities	8	9	5	18	22	37
Touch screens to access information services	8	26	19	27	10	10
Space for schools to display work	9	23	16	27	13	12
Space for display local arts and crafts	9	18	14	29	17	13
Café facilities for users and visitors to the centre	7	19	11	22	21	20
Safe haven to report domestic abuse	8	18	8	18	17	30
Provision of local maps and local information service	9	23	14	23	17	14
Personal care / support room	10	25	15	24	13	12
Community days for local groups to display information	10	17	11	29	20	12
Office support service for community organisations	11	24	16	27	15	7
Room to meet with police and PCSO's	8	20	9	19	19	24
Quiet room for street pastors or others to use	8	25	17	21	16	14
Room for confidential discussions	9	24	16	20	15	14
Conduction of wedding services	9	26	13	21	14	16
Unitary Council information leaflets about Council services	10	22	16	27	13	12
Community notice board and information exchange	10	16	12	27	18	17
Community transport service to supplement public transport	10	16	10	21	22	22
Regular indoor market	9	19	9	19	20	24
Conference facilities for hire (digital projectors, white board)	9	19	13	19	22	17
Alcohol free café for young people	9	21	11	15	18	26
Concerts and entertainment shows	8	11	6	16	23	36
Meeting places for Faith or religious groups	9	34	17	20	9	9
Business seminars and training events for small businesses	9	13	15	22	21	20
Space to examine planning applications	8	16	14	24	19	18

Comment

The random pattern of answers from the majority of the returned surveys demonstrates that the many residents had given careful thought to their answers.

14) Wiltshire Council is adopting a policy whereby Council officers visit the public rather than residents having to travel to Trowbridge for such matters as planning, housing and to make benefit arrangements. Respondents were asked for their opinion on how useful these would be to Warminster on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 equals great benefit.

Percentages

	No answer	1	2	3	4	5
Submission of planning applications	5	14	6	25	19	31
Pre-application meetings with planning officers	6	13	7	26	17	31
Production of documents for benefit claims and benefits advice	6	12	6	19	18	39
Health and wellbeing matters (health advice)	6	15	8	22	18	31
Discussion of housing matters and bidding for social housing	6	13	7	21	19	34

Block Six

15) This question asked if respondents felt that spending the specified amounts for refurbishment would represent good value for money?

Yes	58%
No	39%
Did not answer	3%

Comment

The YES vote of 58% with a confidence level of 95% has a confidence interval of 4%.

Put another way, if the whole population had been asked this question, then 95 times out of 100 the of answer would fall within the range 54% - 62% (i.e. answering yes).

It should be noted that it is essential for the survey sample to be randomly selected.

Find Confidence Interval

Confidence Level: 95% 99%

Sample Size:

Population:

Percentage:

Confidence Interval:

The electoral roll figure at March 2010 was 12,488. Increasing this figure to the adult population of 19,956 make no significant difference to the confidence interval

Confidence interval calculator from:

<http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>

- (16) Respondents were asked for the age group of the person completing the consultation document.

Over 65	40%
Under 65	59%
Did not answer	1%

Comment

The Office of National Statistics mid-year estimates for 2008 (the latest available) show that 58% of the population of Warminster falls into the 16- 65 age range.

The population of over 16 year olds is 19,956. This figure is expected to rise significantly due to extra homes that will be built in the coming decades.

Appendix 1 – ExtractsNo of similar
comments**Working group responses**

Many of these facilities are already provided in the Information Centre, churches or Library.	14	Most of them are not already provided in the form proposed. For example there are only 85 personal care rooms for the use of those with disabilities in the entire country and none in Warminster.
Car parking near the Assembly Rooms is inadequate for anything else to be there.	1	There are 169 spaces in this car park. There is ample provision for those with disabilities
Although I may not use any of the facilities & services I believe them to be important for the community as a whole.	1	Noted
It would make sense for local artists to be involved in any refurbishment – murals – gardens and sculptures.	1	Noted
The questionnaire is misleading as I thought that the issue for discussion is whether the Town Council would spend £800,000 on relocating the Council.	2	The intention is to develop a community hub / civic centre and is not focussed on relocating the Council. The intentions were debated and voted on in full Council. The decision to work towards developing a civic centre / community hub was published in the minutes which have been in the public domain for some time and also mentioned in articles in local newspapers.
Warminster will have to take significantly greater responsibility for its civic management in future. It is the Town Council's duty to get us properly prepared, organised and staffed to manage the Town's needs for the future. You must act now it will be a dereliction of duty not to so do and future generations depend on you to act now - whatever the cost.	1	Noted
We have a perfectly good Library and Tourist Information Centre in the centre of town so why change them to the Assembly Rooms.	1	The consultation document does not mention moving them. The Library is owned by Wiltshire Council. The Information Centre is run by the Warminster and Villages Development Trust.
I would not wish to take custom away from the Athenaeum or other venues.	1	This is very unlikely as the buildings would serve different purposes.

This is expensive. There could be some alteration to the plans e.g. canopy, outside area at the rear to reduce costs.	1	This would not save much money. The canopy would be for the protection from the weather for those who are infirm and disabled. The patio area is needed for storage and fire escape reasons.
I would be in favour of a lesser amount of money to refurbish the building for the benefit of residents but not for the benefit of the Council.	1	The proposals are for the benefit of the residents. Part of the Council's duty is to provide community facilities for the benefit of the residents using the best possible cost / benefit ratio.
No mention of the needs of people with disabilities, wheelchair users, toilets etc.	1	The proposals are for a fully DDA compliant building including a personal needs / support room. Parking for the disabled would also be available directly outside
A community centre in Warminster would be beneficial to the town. I don't believe it should cost £800,000.	1	Only one tender for the work at the final stage of selection was slightly below this figure the rest were considerably higher. The tender process was open and transparent.
This form is ridiculous – the public have already said no to this Assembly Hall acquisition	1	The Council has owned the Assembly Rooms since 2001.
Why is there a need for a new Assembly Rooms	1	There is no such proposal only a refurbishment of the Town's own property.
You have already wasted £22,000 buying chairs for the Assembly Rooms.	1	The tables and chairs needed to be replaced due to fair wear and tear and for health and safety reasons. The total cost was £19,000. If the proposals go ahead this furniture will be reused
In order to justify the high cost its future will depend on its being fully maximised rather than being left empty for most of the time as it is now.	1	A community hub will mean far more people using the building on a daily basis. The building is not empty for most of the time. It is regularly hired for much of the week.
Time to go ahead and make a go of it.	3	Noted
Licensed bar should only be available for events such as Christmas parties and weddings.	1	Noted
Can the upstairs of the Athenaeum be adapted as a community hub	1	The Council does not own the Athenaeum.
There is an abundance of halls for hire.	3	The nearest public hall that can accommodate 330 people seated for a meeting is in Melksham until Trowbridge opens in 2011. Local organisations frequently have a problem booking local smaller halls due to the level of demand.

We had rooms for CAB which is now closed.	1	It is not closed it is part of the Information Centre.
We have a Tourist information, Library, College and Hospital the list is not exhaustive – why would we want to pay out for another hall?	8	None of these venues have sufficient capacity or space to deliver the range of services required in the coming years or a hall for public hire. None of these are in the ownership of the Town Council.
The Assembly Rooms should be sited in a rural setting for the example the park for all to use.	1	The cost of rebuilding would be beyond the means of the Council. The Council does not own the Park. Parking would be an issue. There would also be issues of planning and development control.
It would be nice to go and see people in an office as it used to be rather than dealing over the telephone .	1	Face to face meetings with Council officers is one of the reasons for the proposals.
The town definitely needs a facility like this. If there are objections please pursue other ways of obtaining the funding.	2	Noted
Fostering a sense of community is vital indeed critical for the survival of Warminster.	1	This is one of the reasons for the proposals.
The Assembly Halls are too costly for many. Cut the costs and keep it simple.	8	The Assembly Room hire rates are amongst the cheapest in the county. If the refurbishment goes ahead new rates will need to be decided and user groups views will be taken into consideration. The consultation document asked questions to determine the community's view on charging for kitchen and bar facilities.
We cannot afford to waste this asset. We must make maximum use of it.	1	Noted
I wonder how much this survey has cost and what return you will get.	1	The survey cost £1200. The Government White Paper "Duty to Involve" lays a duty on public sector bodies to carry out public consultation before taking important decisions when spending public funds. Warminster Town Council subscribes to these principles as it is important to obtain the views of the local community. As this was a random sample the return of 37% was well above that needed for statistical analysis.

If this is a poll is anonymous why is it number stamped.	3	It is not a poll. Number stamping is essential to prevent duplicates and for audit purposes. This is in line with market surveys and parliamentary elections. No record of numbers / addresses has been kept.
The council already has offices in Trowbridge (referring to question 14) and this proposal is for the benefit of MP's not the public.	1	The proposal is to bring services closer to the people who need to use them. MPs are not involved.
The council should get real and accept the will of the people.	1	A consultation is to find out the opinions of the public.
The loan is probably being offset by things like parking charges	1	Parking charges are not the responsibility of the Town Council. Income from car parking goes to Wiltshire Council not the Town Council.
I do not see why we as a community should supply surveys that are funded and have return postage. This is typical of a Conservative run Council – cut everything and expect others to fund it. Not acceptable.	2	A public consultation is one of the normal methods of obtaining public opinion. The Government's White Paper "Duty to Involve" lays a duty on public bodies to consult with the public before making decisions involving spending large sums of public money. As a matter of good governance Warminster Town Council subscribes to these principles.
Use more fully the premises already allocated to the Council.	1	There are no other premises allocated to the Council. The Council owns Dewey House and the Assembly Rooms.
The Assembly Rooms are no use at all and should be pulled down.	1	This would result in the loss of a valuable community facility, redundancy for 4 people and loss of casual employment for 4 others
I find the Assembly Rooms are totally unsuitable for most of the uses proposed. What we need is a Town Hall for community events and council services.	1	The proposals are designed to make the building more suitable
I recommend a trip to the Library where most of what is sought is contained.	1	Most of the facilities in the list are not provided in the Library. The Library is not owned by Warminster Town Council.
Use the space for housing and spend the money on the Old Town Hall. Develop the Old Town Hall WCR could move there as well	27	This is not financially viable and would result in a less flexible building with much reduced space available. See appendix 3.

The Assembly Rooms may be too small to accommodate the functions in the list unlike the Town Hall which unlike the Assembly Rooms, is an historic building worth saving.	2	The building known as the Old Town Hall has not been used as such since the early 1900s. There would be limited space in the building. See appendix 3.
I think £800,000 would be better spent on keeping schools updated.	1	Schools are the responsibility of Wiltshire Council. The Town Council has no control over them.
This survey is a waste of money you do what you want anyway.	2	Councillors are democratically elected to take decisions on behalf of the electorate. In a democracy there will always be people who disagree with the decisions made. Equally there will be those who are perfectly happy.
It is difficult to contemplate the use of financial resources when Wiltshire Council is seeking to reduce its outgoings. The Town Council should divest itself of its holdings rather than impose another tax burden.	1	The Town Council only owns Dewey House and the Assembly Rooms. There are no plans to increase any taxes to pay for this new facility
Why not use the Old Town Hall for its original purpose.	1	It has not been used as a Town Hall since the early 1900's.
The Town Hall, which is a beautiful building, is officially ours.	2	A previous administration took the decision to sell the building which it had a legal right to do. It is now in private hands (receivership).
Close Dewey House and sell it off.	3	CCTV would need to be relocated at a cost of at least £40,000. There would then be the on-going costs of rental and rates for the new premises to house the equipment. This would have to be covered by the town precept. Dewey House is hired by a number of community organisations on a regular basis. A decision was made by the Council on 15 th June 2009 not to sell Dewey House.
Parking, as at the Assembly Rooms, is essential.	2	This is one of the big advantages of using the Assembly Rooms.
The cricket club, football club and rugby clubhouse could host most of the events listed.	1	These are private clubs and do not have the space. The consultation shows what the public think is important.
The facilities (referring to the bar and kitchen) are already there.	1	This comment is not understood. The consultation was asking about charging for these facilities.
It would be nice to sit somewhere warm without buying anything.	1	Noted

Would prefer to see the building demolished and a new purpose built facility on the site.	1	Consultants have estimated the cost of this as £1.5m without the fitting out costs such as carpets and curtains.
Acquiring the Old Town Hall would add nothing if the Assembly Rooms could deliver it all.	1	Noted
We have our own valuable and much needed asset – the Assembly Rooms.	1	Noted
How long to repay the loan? 25 years is too long.	2	This was stated on the rear of the accompanying letter. 25 years - which is normal for a Council loan of this type.
I am concerned about the threat to the Library and Athenaeum. Local facilities could lose out.	1	There is no threat to either of these that the Working Group is aware of.
Retain Dewey House as the Council Offices.	3	The Council has made a decision to retain Dewey House. It does not have the space or meet the DDA requirements for modern administration work.
Council tax is already out of hand. Better to spend the money on keeping the Council tax down.	3	Council tax is raised by Wiltshire Council and has no bearing on this proposal. (Warminster TC contribution to Council Tax is on average £73.02 per annum, per band D Property)
Better to spend the money on saving jobs	1	Town Council precept will have no bearing on this. If the Assembly Rooms close 4 people will be made redundant and 4 casual workers will lose their jobs. If the refurbishment takes place it could create extra jobs for example Wiltshire Council reception and office staff. In addition there would be opportunities for traders to increase business e.g. catering as well as space for local artists to exhibit their wares.
Cost is a challenge. Other local facilities are available. Other venues have attached groups by providing better services at reduced costs.	1	The services mentioned in the consultation are not already provided in Warminster in the proposed form so it is difficult to see how better services are being provided elsewhere.
Submission of planning applications and pre-applications at the Library.	1	This would be extremely difficult to manage without interfering with the use of the Library.
The extension of the facilities listed would be a great encouragement to people in the local communities and rural areas to take a greater interest in the well being of us all.	1	This is part of the Localism and Big Society agendas.

I think it is an exciting proposition that such a site with flat access and ease of parking could become the centre of much help to this community. I hope it goes ahead.	2	The access and parking are an important part of the Council's proposals.
If this proposal goes ahead adjacent parking should not be allocated to Council officers (unless disabled).	1	Wiltshire Council does not allocate parking spaces for its officers at local car parks. Space for Town Council staff would be available at the side of the building as at present. This is not part of Wiltshire Council car park.
Plan well ahead as substantial increases in housing and population will make what seems a large sum now far greater in a few years when it becomes a must.	1	The Town Council is planning ahead for our future generations by proposing to retain and refurbish the building.
Why has money not been put aside for repairs. You are paid to plan ahead.	1	Town Councillors receive no pay or allowances for this work. The proposals are part of a five year plan to review the future of the Assembly Rooms which was begun under the former administration. Money has been set aside for essential maintenance. The provisions made will not match the changing and increasing demand and need to provide community services and facilities in the coming years.
If it could be like that so many people would benefit – it would be great.	3	Noted
I do not want the Council to move to the Assembly Rooms. Mine is a no vote.	3	This is a consultation not a vote.
Stability for WCR Move WCR to Dewey House and the Council to the Old Town Hall	2	The future of WCR is important for the community and the Council continues to support this organisation. Unfortunately good governance dictates that the future of a private charity, however valuable to the community, cannot be considered when making decisions about spending public money.
Would it make more economic sense to demolish the building and have a new purpose built facility.	1	See appendix 3
The Old Town Hall should be refurbished and used as a court for local crimes, weddings and other official duties.	1	The provision of courts is under the jurisdiction of HM Courts Service. New courts to cover the south and west of the county have recently opened in Salisbury.

It is about time the Council listened to what we want.	1	<p>The purpose of the public consultation is to obtain residents' views to help inform the Council's final decision.</p> <p>The council has a duty to listen to all residents not just those who oppose its proposals.</p>
The hall must support itself as a going concern or be disposed of and sold.	1	Community facilities do not necessarily need to break even.
This is a backdoor method of getting what the Council wants.	1	The consultation aims to obtain information from a random sample of Warminster residents. It has been widely mentioned in articles in local newspapers, discussed in Council meetings and information published in the minutes. It is a random consultation and therefore hard to see how this can be a backdoor method.
I am a builder. I query the cost of £800,000 – how do you get such a precise figure.	4	It was an open tendering process. Any building company was free to submit their own quote for the work.
Warminster Town Council had a referendum in which 94% of the participants voted no to a community centre.	1	The Council has not held a referendum. A parish poll was called by a small number of residents. The question asked at the poll did not mention a community centre or the reasons for the need to refurbish the building for present and future generations.
<p>Why do we need a consultation – we had a parish poll.</p> <p><i>Plus letters in the local newspaper and concerns voice during public participation at Council meetings.</i></p>	3	<p><i>Parish polls which may be demanded at a parish meeting by a specified number of electors. These may be held on any question arising at the meeting but the result is not binding (Local Government Act 1972); (House of Commons Library)</i></p> <p>http://www.parliament.uk/briefingpapers/commons/lib/research/briefings/snpc-03409.pdf</p> <p>-----</p> <p>The parish poll asked a completely different question at a time when full information was not available. It concerned "the Council's idea of moving to the Assembly Rooms." This is actually only a small part of the overall proposal to develop a community hub / civic centre.</p> <p>The question did not consider costs, funding streams, partnership working, localism, or other reasons.</p>

It cannot be guaranteed that the result did not suffer from self-selection bias.

The Council needed other information which the parish poll question did not provide hence the consultation.

A parish poll is a merely an opinion poll and does not infer a binding vote – nor does it confer any mandate.

It is a only snapshot in time of the opinions of those who voted.

A quote from the community organisation
ACRE: (Action with Communities in Rural England)

(<http://www.acre.org.uk/DOCUMENTS/publications/briefings/sep10/ACREbriefingParish%20pollsAugust2010.pdf>)

Polls deliver low turnout, despite efforts by the community to raise local interest and regardless of how significant the local issue might be. This is a costly approach, given that there is no guarantee of an adequate mandate either way at the end of the process. It also carries the risk of subsequent polls being called for by a small section of the community to either overturn the result or confuse the outcome.

Even if a poll achieves a significant majority, a low turnout fails to give a clear demonstration of the community support required. The result is often hotly contested by the losing side, alienating a significant proportion of the community and inhibiting the potential for any future work on resolving local issues.

There is clear evidence that a failure to achieve sufficient turnout or support in a vote will lead to long lasting conflict in the community, which is not conducive to building the Big Society.

		<p>Extract about parish polls from the Local Government Association's response to the consultation on the Sustainable Communities Act.</p> <p>(http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pageId=2648395)</p> <p><i>The money spent on such resource hungry eventualities should be spent on community assets. There is already the opportunity to present a petition, hold meetings, speak in the public forum at the council meeting, utilise the media, etc.</i></p> <p><i>It angers the majority of residents, who do not like to see their money wasted in this way, it is divisive, and Government at all tiers is blamed for allowing it to happen. This is emphasised by the fact that it is, rightly, non binding on any authority and merely an expression of opinion by a small number of people.</i></p>
Sell the Assembly Rooms and use the money towards a new build or adapting a building such as the police station.	1	The Council does not own any other buildings apart from Dewey House. The police station is a matter for the Police Authority.
The hall could be used for training / conferences for businesses and organisations to generate income	1	This is part of the Council's proposals.
<p>Assembly Rooms must remain a community centre but the town cannot afford to take on a loan of £800,000.</p> <p>I find it extraordinary that such an expense is being considered. Fund raising from wealthy benefactors would be more appropriate.</p>	4	<p>Without a loan the Assembly Rooms will have to be closed and will not remain in community use. Redundancy and unemployment will follow for the staff involved.</p> <p>It is normal practice for Councils to take out this kind of loan when providing facilities for the community for present and future generations.</p>
The council should look to maintaining existing services and expand the use of existing venues before considering expensive council chambers.	1	The council does not currently provide the services mentioned in the survey. It is not considering expensive council chambers but the development of community facilities.
No breakdown of costs have been provided.	1	Costs have been available to the public in Dewey House for many months.

We cannot do without the ante-room for public use.	1	The Council's proposals include replacing the ante-room by providing several other equivalent areas of space.
The money is a lot. It depends what we have to lose. The town has suffered from a loss of shops and the road works.	1	The proposals may help to attract more trade in the town as more residents would be using the Assembly Rooms for a whole variety of new purposes.
Warminster Town Council is really a parish council and should behave accordingly. The Town Council should not be involved in running social arrangements.	2	<p>The Town Council has the:</p> <p>Power to provide buildings and offices for public meetings and assemblies.</p> <p>Statutory provision: Local Government Act 1972 s.133</p> <p>Power to provide and encourage the use of public facilities</p> <p>Statutory Provision: Local Government Act 1972 s. 144</p> <p>Power to provide and equip buildings for the use of clubs having athletic, social or educational objectives</p> <p>Statutory Provision: Local Government (Miscellaneous Provision) Act 1976 s.19</p>
We need to keep the community continuing as a result of modern living. A place for functions, advice and events is vital for this. If prices and contributions have to rise a little then if this was necessary it would be understood.	2	The provision of facilities is one of the main purposes of the Council's proposals.
A 10p levy will only be paid by Warminster residents.	1	There is no intention to charge a 10p levy.
The Assembly Rooms should be sold off and the proceeds used to develop the library.	1	The Library does not belong to Warminster Town Council.
It seems you are trying to make a case to have your way.	6	The Council have always maintained that a consultation would be held when all the facts were known. The results of this consultation can be discussed alongside the other evidence accumulated, all of which is in the public domain.

I don't think the Government will give you the money unless you know something the public don't.	1	It is normal for loans to come from the Public Works Loan Board but this is not the only source of finance for work of this kind.
Just carry out the essential repairs only.	2	Other work needs to be done to satisfy modern building regulations and to make the hall more attractive and accessible to potential hirers.
Are you becoming an extension of the Unitary Council.	1	Warminster Town Council works alongside Wiltshire Council to try to deliver the best services for the residents.
I do not think that any scheme which puts the town into debt is worth considering.	2	It is normal for Councils to borrow money for the provision of community facilities both for the present and future generations. This is often how library, sports and leisure facilities are provided not to mention roads.
Sell it to a profitable organisation to use.	2	Informal investigations have shown that a Third Party would be very unlikely to take on the building for this purpose. It would still need a sum of money spent on repairs and to bring it in line with building regulations.
Health and wellbeing activities can be at surgeries - a community hub is not necessary. Blood donation can be at the surgery.	2	Doctors' practices are private commercial companies who have contracts with the NHS. The council has no influence over them. The surgeries could not cope with the large numbers of people who give blood at these sessions.
Without visibility of the cost estimates and demand for services it is impossible to evaluate value for money.	2	All information gathered to date can be viewed at Dewey House.
The facilities at Dewey House are adequate for the council and chamber.	1	The proposals are about developing community facilities and not just about a council chamber and offices.
The Old Town Hall and former Post Office appear to be attractive buildings capable of providing some benefit to the community.	1	Neither belong to the Town Council. The former Post Office is in use.
Other alternatives have not been considered.	3	A full SWOT analysis of other venues was in the paper presented to Full Council earlier this year. A further paper was also submitted comparing possible options.

<p>People should go Trowbridge for Council matters.</p> <p>I do not think it is unreasonable to travel to Trowbridge for these facilities</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>Some members of the public such as the vulnerable and elderly find this a problem with travelling, cost and time. It is also a problem for young people and families without transport.</p>
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Appendix 2 – Extracts from requested consultations.

<p>The council's intention is to ride roughshod over public opinions about the Assembly Rooms issue - councillors should resign. This is the most arrogant and flagrantly undemocratic behaviour I have witnessed. All who voted for this absurd plan should resign.</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>The vote on whether to go ahead has not yet taken place.</p> <p>It is hard too see how a public consultation asking for 1500 residents' views can be considered as riding roughshod over them.</p> <p>Councillors are democratically elected to take decisions on behalf of the electorate. In a democracy there will always be people who disagree with the decisions made. Equally there will those who are perfectly happy.</p>
<p>The council is not being democratic it has arranged a random survey.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>A public consultation is one of the normal methods of obtaining public opinion. The Government's White Paper "Duty to Involve" lays a duty on public bodies to consult with the public before making decisions involving spending large sums of public money. As a matter of good governance Warminster Town Council subscribes to these principles.</p>
<p>This (hall for hire) is not within the Council's remit.</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>It is within the Council's remit. The building is already owned by and is the responsibility of the Town Council. It has the:</p> <p>Power to provide buildings and office for public meetings and assemblies.</p> <p>Statutory provision: Local Government Act 1972 s.133</p> <p>Power to provide and encourage the use of public facilities</p> <p>Statutory Provision: Local Government Act 1972 s. 144</p> <p>Power to provide and equip buildings for use of clubs having athletic, social or educational objectives</p> <p>Statutory Provision: Local Government (Miscellaneous Provision) Act 1976 s.19</p>

The Council should not be involved in this type of commercial venture (referring to hall hire)	2	It is normal practice for Town and Parish Councils to provide a hall for hire by the local community. In Wiltshire most other Councils have halls for hire on a commercial basis: Westbury – Laverton Institute Melksham – Assembly Hall Trowbridge – Civic Hall Bradford on Avon – St Margaret's Hall Chippenham – Neeld Hall Salisbury – Guild Hall Corsham – Town Hall Devizes – Corn Exchange Pewsey – Bouverie Hall Amesbury – Bowman Centre
In my opinion the Assembly Hall is fine as it is and Dewey House more than adequate for council needs.	1	Professional opinion following a number of surveys indicated that essential work needs to be urgently carried out on the Assembly Rooms.
Where would the extra offices go without reducing the size of the main hall.	1	They can be accommodated. The plans have been in the public domain for over a year and the proposed layout can clearly be seen.
Other buildings could be used such as the library or Athenaeum.	1	These do not belong to the Town Council and are used for other purposes.
Sell the building and use the funds for the Old Town Hall.	2	This is not viable financially and for space reasons. See appendix three.
I have already attended one public meeting on the question of spending council tax payers money on the Assembly Rooms. It was overwhelming defeated. Accept the verdict or resign.	1	If this refers to the parish meeting - less than 0.5% of electorate attended – a very low figure. Any vote has no legal standing and cannot be taken as representative of the population as a whole. A parish meeting cannot confer a mandate.
You are missing the point entirely. We already have all the facilities in a variety of locations and doubling up is a wasteful and irresponsible use of money we do not have.	3	The list suggested facilities most of which are not in place.
Questions not relevant to 25 year loan.	1	Without a loan of 25 years none of the things mentioned in the questions would be possible.
Most are not of advantage to the local community. Try using telephone, fax or internet.	1	The services suggested cannot be delivered by these means. Even if they could there would be issues for the vulnerable. Public consultations have overwhelmingly shown that residents would prefer face-to-face meetings.
The questions carry the stench of a hidden agenda.	1	It is difficult to see how a consultation to gather information can have a hidden agenda.

Appendix 3 – Other options in response to comments.

<p>Sell the Assembly Rooms and use the money towards purchasing and refurbishing the building known as The Old Town Hall.</p>	<p>This option would be more expensive and would require borrowing a larger sum of money. The result would be a less flexible offering with a great deal less space than available in the Assembly Rooms. It should be noted that the partnership offer from Wiltshire Council would not be available for this building.</p> <p>The building is in private hands and for sale at £400,000. The cost of refurbishment to make this fully DDA compliant to the standards needed for a public building has been estimated at £800,000 to which must be added architect's, survey and planning fees bringing the total to approximately £1.3 million pounds. The maximum that the Council could raise from the sale of the Assembly Rooms site assuming it could find a buyer is approximately £335,000 (as professionally valued) leaving a borrowing requirement of £965,000. There could be difficulties around selling community assets to a developer under Planning Policy CF2.</p> <p>Even if such a sale could be effected at the price stated and there were no time-scale implications it would still mean borrowing £165,000 more than needed for the proposed Assembly Rooms project.</p> <p>The space available for meetings would be a lot less than that available in the Assembly Rooms. Those responding to the consultation stated that the size of the present Assembly Rooms is "about right" for seated meetings. Meetings and functions of this size could not be accommodated in the Old Town Hall. The nearest large hall of equivalent size for public functions would be in Melksham until the refurbishment of Trowbridge Civic Hall is completed in 2011</p> <p>Department of Transport guidance is that parking for those with a disability using walking aids should be within 50 metres of a public building. This requirement cannot be met at this site.</p> <p>It would be very difficult to provide a personal care support room with street access for those with a disability.</p> <p>There would be on-going heavy maintenance costs for this listed building and for pest control. Funds for this would have to be met from the Town Council precept.</p> <p>The partnership offer from Wiltshire Council would not be available for this building to help defray the costs.</p>
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<p>Sell the Assembly Rooms to a developer and build a new facility on another site.</p>	<p>There are difficulties in selling community assets to a developer without making provision for their replacement. Assuming this could be done it would be necessary to find a suitable large site easily accessible in the centre of Warminster and then to fund the cost of land purchase all within an acceptable time scale. This option is not considered viable.</p>
<p>Demolish the Assembly Rooms and rebuild a purpose built facility.</p>	<p>The cost of this option has been estimated by consultants as over £1.5 million pounds without fitting out costs. The estimated cost of refurbishment is considerably lower at £800,000.</p>
<p>Close the building.</p>	<p>This would result in the loss of community facilities, unemployment and redundancy. The building would still incur costs of mothballing to prevent it from falling into decay.</p>

Appendix 4 – Analysis of the requested consultation documents.

The number of returns was so small that statistically valid results are not available. The responses are therefore given as **numbers not percentages**.

Number of responses = 20 (15 from individuals - 5 from previous user / hirers)

Question 1	Have you used the A/R's?	Yes 16	No 4	Did not answer 0
Question 2	What did you attend?	Uses included Weight Watchers, U3A, Presentations, Antiques Shows and Fitness classes.		
Question 3	Should a hall be provided?	Yes 10	No 10	Did not answer 0
Question 4	From the no answers to Q3 What is a suitable size?	Too low 0	About right 9	Too high 1
Question 5	Bar facilities?	Yes 5	No 5	Did not answer 0
Question 6	Kitchen facilities?	Included 9	Extra 1	No 0
Question 7	Crockery?	Included 9	Extra 1	No 0
Question 8	Dedicated council chamber?	Yes 0	No 20	Did not answer 0
Question 11	Location of Assembly Rooms?	Yes 7	No 13	Did not answer 0

	No answer	1	2	3	4	5
Grass cutting and landscaping	2	7	2	6	2	1
Grounds maintenance (e.g. parks and playing fields)	3	7	2	5	1	2
Enforcement (e.g. dog fouling, litter, graffiti)	2	8	0	5	3	2
Control and enforcement of car parks	2	6	0	5	3	2
Public toilets	2	6	1	5	2	4
Markets and street trading	2	9	0	7	1	1
Street cleaning	2	7	1	6	1	3

	No answer	1	2	3	4	5
Meeting places for community organisations	2	8	1	2	3	4
Rooms for voluntary sector to deliver services	4	8	4	3	0	1
Health and wellbeing activities	3	8	0	2	5	2
Touch screens to access information services	4	10	4	1	1	0
Space for schools to display work	3	11	3	0	1	2
Space for display local arts and crafts	3	10	4	0	1	2
Café facilities for users and visitors to the centre	3	13	1	2	1	0
Safe haven to report domestic abuse	2	13	0	2	1	2
Provision of local maps and local information service	3	13	0	4	0	0
Personal care / support room	4	13	1	2	0	0
Community days for local groups to display information	3	6	1	7	1	2
Office support service for community organisations	4	9	2	4	0	1
Room to meet with police and PCSO's	3	12	1	2	0	2
Quiet room for street pastors or others to use with teenagers	3	12	0	4	1	0
Room for confidential discussions	4	12	1	1	2	0
Conduction of wedding services	3	14	0	1	0	2
Unitary Council information leaflets about Council services	2	10	1	5	1	1
Community notice board and information exchange	2	9	0	7	2	0
Community transport service to supplement public transport	3	11	2	2	1	1
Regular indoor market	2	12	1	4	0	1
Conference facilities for hire	2	11	0	4	1	2
Alcohol free café for young people	2	12	1	2	2	1
Concerts and entertainment shows	3	8	1	2	1	5
Meeting places for Faith or religious groups	2	12	2	3	1	0
Business seminars and training events to help small businesses	2	9	4	5	0	0
Space to examine planning applications	2	10	1	5	0	2

	No answer	1	2	3	4	5
Submission of planning applications	3	9	2	5	0	1
Pre-application meetings with planning officers	2	9	2	5	0	2
Production of documents for benefit claims and benefits advice	2	9	2	3	2	2
Health and wellbeing matters (health advice)	2	13	0	2	2	1
Discussion of housing matters and bidding for social housing	2	7	3	5	2	1

		Yes	No	Did not answer
Question 16	Value for money?	4	16	0

		Under 65	Over 65	Did not answer
Question 17	Age range?	6	12	2

Comment

The consultation forms in this section were all requested by residents. There is a clear correlation between the desire to become involved in the survey and the consistently low values given to the three lists of community services and facilities.

This is a demonstration of self-selection bias against the proposals with the associated polarisation of results. It is a clear example of the reason why, in order to gain a true reflection of residents' views, a random sample was necessary.

Appendix - 5

Summary – key points

Statistics

- The survey achieved a return of 553 useable forms – response rate 36.7%. Professional advice is that in pure statistical terms the “magic” number of 400 responses are required beyond which the percentages in respect of answers will hardly change.
- The response generated a confidence interval of +/- 4% with a confidence level of 95% which is that generally used by market research professionals.

Key questions

Question 3. - Do you think the Town Council should provide a hall for residents or community and voluntary organisations to hire?

Yes response = 87% (range 83% - 91% @ 95% confidence level)

Question 4. do you think that the number that can be seated is:

About right response = 81% (of those answering yes to question 3)

Response = 81% (range 77% - 85% @ 95% confidence level)

Comment

These two results together are very significant. The very large majority of respondents indicated that the Town Council should provide a hall for hire by community and voluntary organisations capable of seating 330 or more people .

Question 11. Do you think the Assembly Rooms are located in a suitable site for development as a civic centre / community hub?

Yes response = 81% (range 77% - 85% @ 95% confidence level)

Comment

This response indicate that respondents felt that Assembly Rooms, on the edge of the Western Car Park, are sited in a suitable location for development as a civic centre / community hub.

Question 15. To deliver a wide range of services and facilities to meet the needs of the community would mean that the council would have to borrow £800,000 as outlined on the rear of the letter accompanying this document. Repaying the loan would mean that the equivalent of 10p per member of the electorate per week would be paid from council funds. Do you feel that this would represent good value for money.

Yes response = 58% (range 54% - 62% @ 95% confidence level)

Comment

A number of options have been put forward since the figure of 10p was calculated which could reduce this and the amount to be borrowed should the Town Council so decide. These include:

A partnership offer from Wiltshire Council.

A request WCR to purchase the part of the building which they use.

Use of Town Council reserves.